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ABSTRACT

This issue looks at the different ways in which British providers of postsecondary education can weigh the quality of their provision to inform and shape improvements. The articles aim to provide a feel for current practice in internal evaluation to improve quality and to get providers thinking about some ways in which they can collect and use data to focus on learner-centered improvement. "Providers 'Probe' Their Processes" (Alun Davies) explains how Bishop Burton College probed its processes to identify areas for improvement. "Take a Look at Yourself" (Phil Cox) addresses developing the capacity for self-improvement through six steps. "In Search of the Student Voice" (Tracy Cullis and Rhiannon Lloyd-Jones) reports on how Leicester College and Gateway Sixth Form College gathered student feedback, an essential part of self-assessment, to identify what really mattered to them. "A Process for Improvement" (Rosemary Moorse) describes how 24 colleges improved observation of group and individual tutorials by charting observation processes, identifying action points, and linking with other colleges to learn from their practice. "Going with the Flow and beyond" (Theresa Leaning) reports on brainstorming Solihull Sixth Form College's initial assessment and learning support services. "Quality Assured" (Margaret Morgan) explains Southwark College's approach to responsibility for quality issues. "Observing Teaching and Learning in Adult and Community Education" (Joni Cunningham) describes how four neighboring adult services got together. Lists of publications, events, and contacts are provided. (YLB)

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you don't fatten pigs by weighing them

Muriel Green Commissioning Editor mgreen@LSDA.org.uk

This issue of *Quality matters* looks at the different ways in which providers can weigh up the quality of their provision to inform and shape improvements.

Colleges have had a number of years' experience of self-assessment. Using a range of tools and techniques, they have collected qualitative and quantitative data to undertake a self-critical analysis of their performance. But some colleagues would argue that there has been a greater emphasis on using data to prove, rather than **improve**, quality. And I guess we would all subscribe to that age-old saying, 'You don't fatten pigs by weighing them'!

Our spring term articles aim to give you a feel for current practice in internal evaluation to improve quality. We hope to get you thinking about some of the ways in which you can collect and use data to focus on learner-centred improvement.

The next issue will look at teaching and learning. Do contact me if you would like to share your experiences of collecting and using quality data to improve teaching and learning in your institution.

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providers 'probe' their processes

Bishop Burton College decided to 'probe' its processes in order to identify areas for improvement. Alun Davies, Vice Principal, explains

The college had been looking for a way to carry out self-assessment and benchmark the results against other colleges. Learning Probe was featured in an issue of *FE now* and it seemed ideal. A phone call to Jane Owen at LSDA and I was convinced. Soon after committing the college, I received the Learning Probe pack. This consisted of eight copies of a questionnaire, which once completed and analysed would provide us with a snapshot of the current position.

A representative from each of the four academic areas, plus three representatives from the support and administrative sections, were selected to take part. As team coordinator, I was keen for staff on the 'shop floor' to be included. Next, we spent a day with a Learning Probe facilitator. Our first priority was to learn how to be objective and pool our knowledge. We decided to select one section from the questionnaire – staff management – which contained 10 questions. Each question had a statement and we had to choose the statement that was most appropriate to different parts of the college.

The first question produced widely varying results from members of the team. There then ensued a, shall I say, healthy debate – each member convinced that their view was the correct one.

It soon became clear to us all that each of our views were equally valuable and that we should evaluate the views held on whether they were based on an isolated incident or on a much wider knowledge of the issue in question. It took 2 hours to agree the first question we looked at. Only another 92 to go! However, it was essential for the team to go through the initial phase because, thereafter, the opinions of all the members were listened to and assessed by the team on a consistent basis. Session over and we were all exhausted but very pleased with our efforts, and I was delighted with how such a disparate team had gelled.

At the end of the meeting the team agreed that each member should complete the questionnaire, making sure that they enlisted the views of others within their section or department. We then met a second time to discuss and agree a grade for each question. Fifty per cent of the questions were quickly discussed and an agreed grade obtained. A further 40% required much more discussion while the final 10% would, I think, still be discussed if the team was allowed to!

With the grades agreed, the eight questionnaires were sent to the facilitator for analysis and benchmarking.

As team coordinator I was keen for staff on the 'shop floor' to be included

He returned to the college to give initial feedback on how we compared with other colleges and organisations in different sectors. A short time after this meeting we received the Learning Probe benchmarking report. This report answered the following points.

- How good are the practices we deploy and the performance we achieve?
- How do we compare, in these terms, with others who provide services of many different kinds across many sectors?
- In particular, how do we compare with those within the sample who represent the most readily available 'like-for-like' comparison – those who are in the same sector as us – other colleges?

The graphs and bar charts very clearly demonstrated where our strengths lay and areas for improvement.

The whole self-assessment exercise was of tremendous benefit to the participants. I hope to repeat the Learning Probe exercise with another group of staff this year.

For more information about Learning Probe, e-mail **jowen@LSDA.org.uk**

Also available, *A college guide to benchmarking*. See page 14.

take a look at yourself

Phil Cox, Development Advisor, RQA Programme on developing the capacity for self-improvement

Self-assessment starts from the premise that real and sustainable improvements in performance can only be achieved if service providers take 'ownership' of quality matters. Self-assessment can help individuals, teams and whole organisations to identify strengths and weaknesses, to compare performance, to prioritise improvement needs and set targets for improvement. It can also help them respond to the needs of their internal or external customers.

Yet critics of self-assessment in post-16 learning point to the long-term failure of many 'coasting' colleges to continuously improve their performance. They also draw attention to longstanding disparities between self-assessment and inspection grades as evidence of shortcomings in the rigour of self-assessment. These concerns have led to an increased level of intervention in the work of colleges, but also counter charges of excessive external regulation. How, therefore, can colleges develop their capacity for self-improvement in order to reduce the present level of scrutiny by external agencies and how can these agencies develop strategies that promote quality ownership within colleges?

For more information on this article e-mail **pcox@LSDA.org.uk**

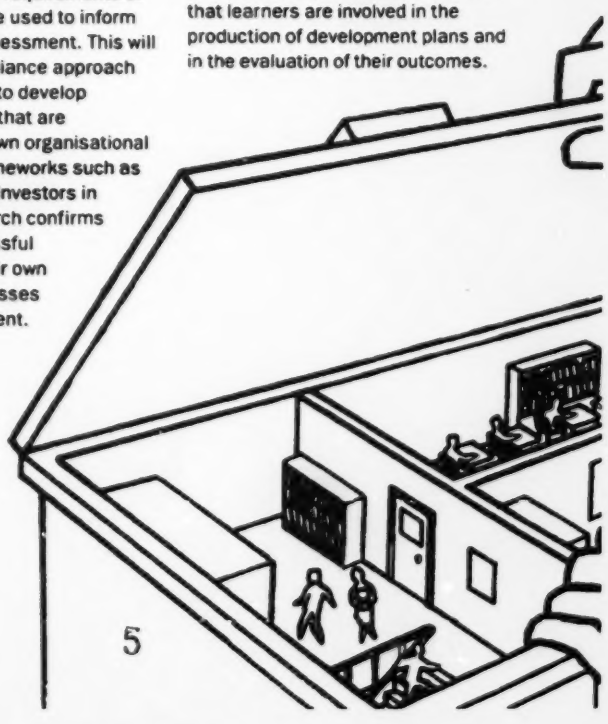
Make self-assessment responsive to organisational needs

Most learning providers are now using the Common Inspection Framework as the basic template for self-assessment. This has encouraged colleges to refocus on their core learning and guidance processes. The framework has perhaps been less helpful in addressing the wider aspects of provision that impact on the quality of the learning experience and learner attainment. There are concerns too that the drafting of reports against the areas of learning (rather than curriculum structures of the college) may distort self-assessment processes.

Since there is ultimately no prescribed framework for self-assessment, a sensible strategy would be to ensure that the requirements of national agencies are used to inform but not drive self-assessment. This will help to avoid a compliance approach and enable colleges to develop integrated practices that are responsive to their own organisational needs (including frameworks such as Excellence Model or Investors in People). LSDA research confirms that the most successful colleges develop their own strategies and processes for quality improvement.

Focus on the needs and attainments of learners

The primary purpose of self-assessment should be to improve the quality of the learner experience and standards of learner attainment. Consider how the 'core' teaching, learning and guidance processes of the college enhance the experiences of individual learners and contribute to learner success. Consider too how the 'enabling' processes of the college (the processes for managing quality, information, staff etc) contribute to the effectiveness of the core processes. Actively involve learners in the self-assessment processes of the college. 'Learner-centred improvement' requires not only an improved understanding of learner needs but also a greater respect for learner judgements. Also ensure that learners are involved in the production of development plans and in the evaluation of their outcomes.



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Collaborate with other providers

Colleges should use self-assessment to specify their strengths and contributions to the local community. They should also assess actual/ potential links with other providers that might further improve responsiveness to local needs. Partnerships with other organisations allow work practices to be compared. Give self-assessment and development planning an external focus. Involve key educational and business partners.

Improve the rigour of self-assessment processes and judgements

Self-assessment should be an integral part of organisational development and undertaken as a continuous process, not an annual event. Involve staff at all levels, in all activities and in all functions of the college. Establish cross-functional teams to integrate the learner experience. Self-assessment should be objective, evaluative (not descriptive) and deal even-handedly with weaknesses as well as strengths. Ensure that 'strengths' represent performance above expected or normal practice. Make sure that staff develop the skills necessary for analysing and improving performance.

Go beyond self-assessment

Critical self-assessment must not become an end in itself but a means of achieving (and demonstrating) continuous improvement. Development plans arising from the self-assessment process should identify SMART objectives for improvement (specific, measurable, achievable, results-orientated and time-bound), with activities, responsibilities and resources for achieving these objectives clearly defined. Good project planning skills will be required for this purpose. It is estimated that 80% of improvement initiatives fail because of poorly prepared development plans.

Clear priorities for improvement should be determined in consultation with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Development plans offer a powerful opportunity to state what can and can't be done. Priorities may include 'quick win' solutions or more radical initiatives that offer long-term benefits. Either way development plans should always prioritise the needs of the learner.

Evaluate outcomes

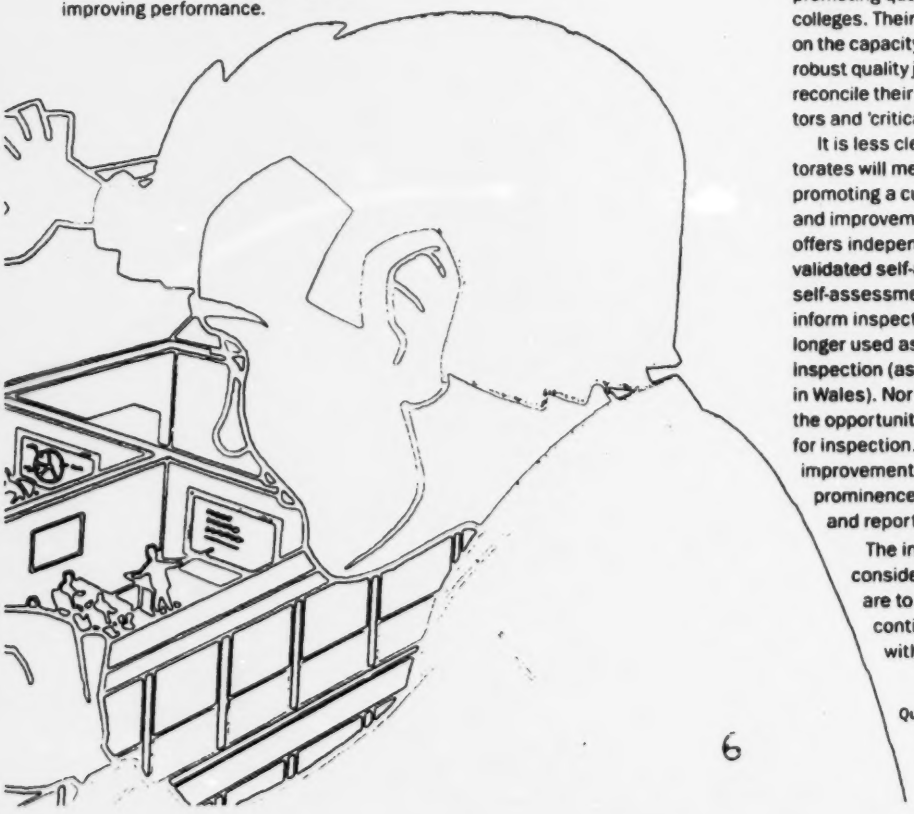
Development plans should be carefully monitored to ensure that actions taken conform to the plan (or reasons for any departure from the plan are agreed). Compare the outcomes of development plans with actual and desired results and record unintended outcomes (positive or negative). The effectiveness and efficiency of quality improvement processes should be reviewed on a regular basis. Do the benefits of the process outweigh the costs? In their preoccupation with external requirements many providers fail to address this fundamental question.

Promote quality ownership within colleges

LSCs will carry out regular monitoring visits to assess quality improvement processes and outcomes within colleges. They are potentially well placed to identify and disseminate good practice. They may also reward good practice (through lighter monitoring, enhanced contracts or Standards Funds), support colleges causing concern, or ultimately sanction weak providers who fail to improve their performance. These are the sticks and carrots available to the councils for promoting quality ownership within colleges. Their effectiveness will depend on the capacity of the councils to deliver robust quality judgements and to reconcile their roles as both the contractors and 'critical friends' of colleges.

It is less clear how the new inspectorates will meet their declared aim of promoting a culture of self-assessment and improvement. Inspection now offers independent judgements, not validated self-assessments. Although self-assessment reports are used to inform inspection planning they are no longer used as the starting point for inspection (as proposed for inspection in Wales). Nor do they offer providers the opportunity to negotiate the agenda for inspection. The capacity for self-improvement is in itself given less prominence in inspection processes and reports.

The inspectorates will need to consider these matters if they are to facilitate a culture of continuous improvement within colleges.



in search of the student voice

gathering student feedback is an essential part of self-assessment. Leicester College and Gateway Sixth Form College get to the heart of what really matters to students

The course representative system – Tracy Cullis, Leicester College

Leicester College is a large FE college with around 32,000 students. Our courses are delivered across four sites and in 93 community centres, which makes it difficult to hear students' opinions.

To make sure that students are given voice a course representative is elected for each programme of study. He or she is responsible for collecting students' views about their course, as well as the college in general, and ensuring that the information is fed into the college's quality improvement system. To encourage students to fulfil this role, the college's student liaison team provides a 2-day training package for all course representatives. This covers issues such as confidentiality, providing clear summaries as they feed back and feeling confident in college meetings.

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The training also gives students an opportunity to collaborate with their peers and staff to work towards improving the student experience.

The course representatives meet once a term at a campus meeting, where they are responsible for airing the views of the students they represent. A report of this feedback is compiled and presented to the senior management team, which is then asked to produce an action plan that identifies which aspects it is able to address. This plan is then sent to the academic board. In addition, the course representatives meet with the principal to reflect on how their views have been acted upon.

Focus groups – Rhiannon Lloyd-Jones, Gateway Sixth Form College

Gateway is an inner-city sixth form college with around 1100 full-time students. We have a strong tutorial/pastoral system and some of the most frequent comments from students are about the friendly and supportive nature of our staff.

To gauge student opinion we have enrolment, on-course and exit reviews, some of which are done through computer questionnaires. In addition, we have student governors, student representation on different boards and a student council, which investigate any issues raised by the student body.

Last year we took a more direct approach by talking to the students in small groups. We selected a range of tutorial groups from different subject areas and levels to reflect the range across the college population. A member of the support staff – someone who had no contact with the students on the academic side – worked with groups of students to look at provision in the college. Through informal discussion and group work, the same areas were covered with each group including application, enrolment, facilities and teaching.

During the session a course of action was decided and one or two members of the group volunteered to be the point of contact and feed back any resulting action. This varied from an individual taking responsibility for following up a specific point (linking with a student in another group if the area was a common one) to issues being referred to the student council or student governor. Over the course of the term, the student council had a number of question and answer sessions with the principal and senior management.

A large number of the students commented on how much information they were given before they began college and how they were sometimes unsure of how to deal with it. This was particularly true in the area of financial support, as Leicester is an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) pilot. Over the following summer holidays we offered days when students and parents could come in and ask for advice or get help with completing forms. We also arranged to talk about the EMA system to Year 11 students in local schools.

In a further example, students completing UCAS forms requested more computer access, as the college uses the electronic application system (EAS). A meeting was set up with the assistant principal responsible for this area, who then arranged for computer rooms to be designated solely for the EAS at certain times during the day.

Despite these changes, we still need to put more time and thought into gathering student opinions. Next year we are looking at extending the focus groups, making the approach more structured without losing the informality, and possibly involving more support staff.

Tracy Cullis and Rhiannon Lloyd-Jones shared their practice at the student guidance network. For details of the network contact Jackie Sadler, tel 01604 784059.

Now available, *Listening to learners*. See page 14.

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Twenty-four colleges agreed to take part in LSDA's work on improving the observation of group and individual tutorials. Each college was asked to chart its observation processes, identify action points and link with other colleges to learn from practice elsewhere. It sounded straightforward says **Rosemary Moorse**, RQA Programme Consultant

a process for

Fence number one: agreement had to be reached on what constituted a tutorial and what activities took place in a group or individual tutorial. For the purpose of the project we settled on the following broad definitions.

Purpose of group tutorials

- To deliver the tutorial curriculum, eg:
  - preparation for higher education or work
  - study skills
  - sex, drugs etc
- To establish a group identity
- To cover qualification or course-related activities such as:
  - portfolio building
  - key skills tracking
  - subject/assignment support.

Purpose of individual tutorials

- To review progress including:
  - giving feedback
  - action planning and target setting
  - coaching and confidence building
- To provide personal or pastoral support relating to, for example:
  - health
  - welfare
  - personal circumstances.

Fence number two: most colleges were using their lesson observation schemes or modified revisions for observing group tutorials and felt that this was appropriate. Very few colleges had developed specific processes for observing individual tutorials. As you can't chart a process that doesn't exist this was potentially a problem! We flowcharted the existing lesson observation scheme and identified aspects of the process that could be improved or developed. At the same time, for each step in the process identified by the flowchart, we asked ourselves: 'Would this work for observing individual tutorials? Does anything need adapting or developing?' And so we ended up with two sorts of actions for the college: the first to improve the existing procedures for observing lessons, the second to help develop an effective process for observing individual tutorials.

So what did the participating colleges need to do to improve their existing schemes? And were major changes needed to accommodate the observation of individual tutorials?

Tidy up procedural aspects

Many of the observation schemes had some aspects that were unclear or underdeveloped. Once identified, such issues were relatively easy to address. Typically actions to address these issues might involve:

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- improving the scheduling of observations to ensure adequate coverage
- clarifying the procedures for following up actions agreed during feedback
- developing the scheme to include an appeals procedure
- putting in place internal validation procedures
- clarifying links to other processes such as appraisal, self-assessment and staff development
- improving record keeping and reporting procedures
- ensuring all observers are interpreting and implementing the scheme in the same way.

Use the observations to bring about improvement

Most colleges acknowledged that while observation provided them with a wealth of information on the quality of teaching and learning they were not using this effectively to bring about improvement. There was also general agreement that improvement was not just about addressing weaknesses in teaching and learning. So for many colleges actions to bring about improvement involved finding ways to:

- disseminate good practice
- address areas of weakness (either of individual staff or recurring weaknesses identified across courses and programmes)
- encourage staff to develop their repertoire of teaching skills, try new approaches and take risks.

Partnership activities

A key aspect of the project was learning from practice elsewhere. Networking started at the launch seminar, with colleges discussing their existing observation schemes. By the end of that day some colleges had already exchanged schemes. The second seminar included two inputs from 'good practice' colleges and further networking opportunities.

One college is planning to develop a partnership arrangement that involves undertaking mutual paired observations. In doing so it hopes to gain an external view in order to validate its observations, improve its observers' confidence and skills in observing and making judgements, and exchange views with observers in another college.

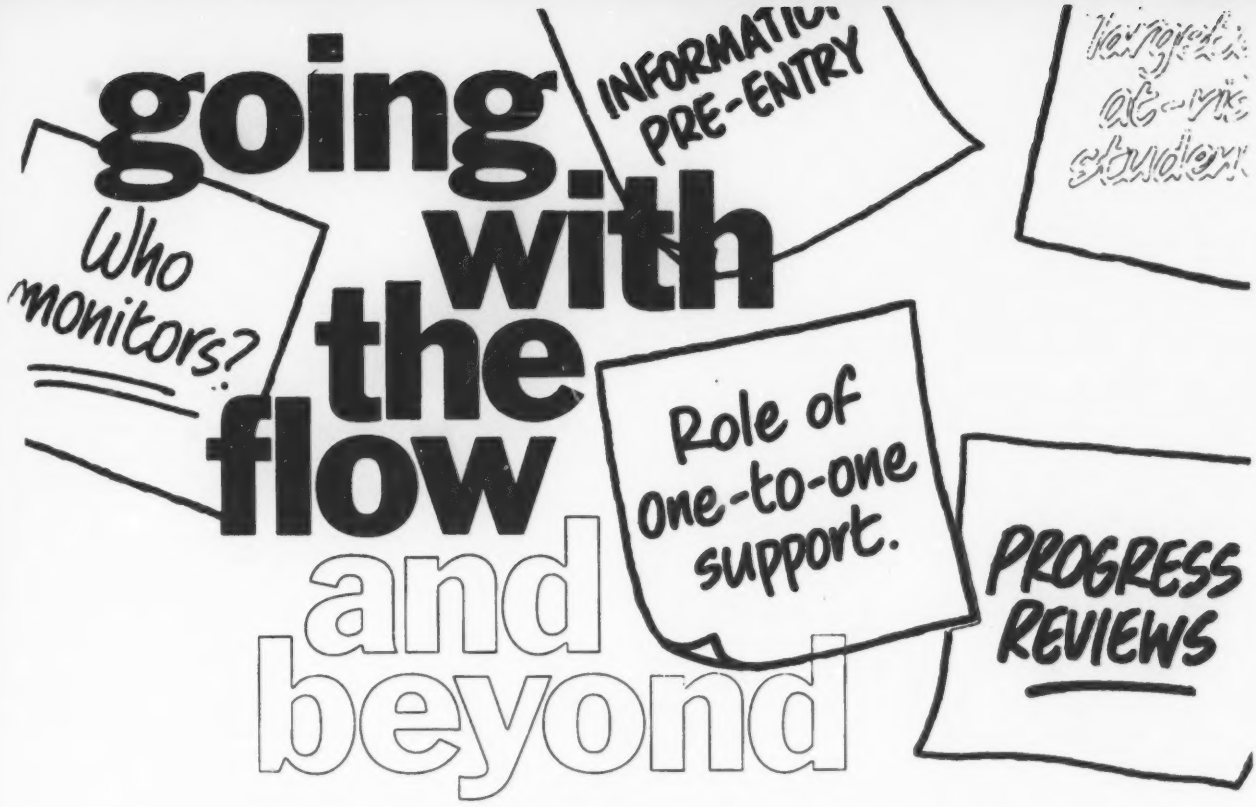
Other outcomes

Of course there are always knock-on effects and unintended outcomes in any development project. Some of the participants have used the project as an opportunity to review the way they manage and deliver their tutorials. Others have used it to develop their observation of other one-to-one activities such as one-to-one support or guidance interviews.

Contact **Muriel Green** for more information on process improvement, e-mail **mgreen@LSDA.org.uk**

Now available: *Improving one to one tutorials* video. See page 14.

going with the flow and beyond



It was a hot afternoon and the atmosphere was like Paddington Station in the rush hour. People were coming and going, there were contributions, comments, exchanges and brief encounters. The walls were covered in multicoloured Post-its – all in the name of process improvement. **Theresa Leaning** and staff from **Solihull Sixth Form College** were brainstorming their initial assessment and learning support services.

How?

Skilled facilitating ensured that we asked and answered fundamental questions about our processes in initial assessment and learning support. In the words of the college coordinator we looked at 'what we actually do, rather than what we think we do'. Our facilitator numbered, renumbered, positioned and repositioned and doggedly teased out what really happens to students. The result was a mosaic that was then dismantled and transformed into a coherent flowchart. We had mapped processes, examined stages and links, agreed where action and decisions happened and had arrived at some simple truths and some complex questions about our provision.

What we learnt

In three words, a great deal. Key questions about meeting the needs of students, efficiency and effectiveness confirmed our growing perception that there was a need for a stronger college-wide understanding of the purpose and nature of learning support.

When our flowchart arrived we were rather disconcerted to discover that there were five routes which students could potentially take to access support – unnecessary duplication or appropriate access? We asked ourselves, if a student accessed all the support on offer was their experience one of coherence or fragmentation? We also began to unpick the following:

- specific learning disabilities
- at-risk students
- counselling
- support for underpinning skills in literacy and numeracy
- key skills delivery and assessment
- study and learning skills.

Discussions emerged about the culture surrounding learning support.

Our strengths emerged along the way, too, in our one-to-one learning support and in-class specialist support. More specifically, we realised that we needed now to reconsider:

- improving pre-entry information
- finding opportunities to link initial assessment with individual learning styles and careers guidance
- what type of initial assessment to use in order to identify support needs
- who should monitor the outcomes of the referral and take up of support
- profiling essential underpinning skills for each subject and assessing individual need against this profile
- which learning support models to use which are integrated with programmes but specific in meeting needs
- monitoring and evaluating learning support to tie in with self-assessment.

Next steps

We are now working towards a college-wide policy and implementation strategy, which will be launched in September 2002. This will begin with a review and evaluation exercise using benchmark data, followed by the setting of targets and quality standards, leading to a consultation exercise. In addition, we plan to partner and benchmark with a similar institution.
The process improvement work has enabled us to be analytical in our self-reflection. We can only recommend that you go with the flow.

Solihull Sixth Form College's analysis of the processes for initial assessment and learning support

1. Pre-entry information
1a. Application form may highlight specific support needs, eg dyslexia
1b. Some information from schools
2. Communications test for all, delivered in tutor groups
2a. Tests marked by additional learning support (ALS) coordinator and ALS tutor
2b. All scores sent to subject leaders and personal tutors. Scores <70% highlighted
2c. Information entered onto database
3. Further test for individual students by appointment
3a. Report back to personal tutor and student
Possible referral to education psychologist
4. Students with Grade E and below in maths identified
5. Range of support activities timetabled. Attendance tracked every 4 weeks
5a. One-to-one support for specific learning difficulties
5b. Maths workshops for re-sit GCSE
5c. Study skills group
5d. 1 hour per week available for numeracy/work-shop support
5e. Support time allocated to GNVQ/AVCE courses (10 hours per year)
5f. Subject-specific workshops in some areas
6. Process for referral by subject tutors during year
6a. Personal tutors review progress
6b. Personal tutors refer student to deputy head of faculty
6c. At-risk students profiled

quality assured

should quality issues be the responsibility of one committee or the whole governing body? Margaret Morgan, Chair of Governors, explains the approach taken by Southwark College

When Baroness Blackstone issued an instruction that all boards should have a quality committee my heart sank. I don't know about you, but I was 'committeed and audited out'. There was also the issue of management responsibility and potential interference. Questions like 'why keep a dog and bark yourself' momentarily flashed through my mind. And what about the view that as governors 'we poke our noses in but not our fingers'?

Most colleges, I suspect, followed the exhortation and established governor quality committees. Other colleges, including mine, took the view that quality should be the responsibility of the whole governing body and not delegated to a committee. The other consideration was that there was no point in governors monitoring retention and achievement in detail if the 'professionals' were doing it as well.

Including students

We decided to set up a college, or professional, working quality standards committee, which would include governor members. We had already, as have many boards, linked every governor with a programme area, which involves them attending faculty review board meetings and other events within their programme areas. The faculty review boards, which include student members, consider in detail their retention and achievement results and it is very instructive to hear programme managers dissecting each other's data and offering colleagues advice and suggestions.

I have come to the view that you need to get behind the statistics and participate in some of the meetings held by staff in order to get a feel for what is going on in the college and whether the systems of monitoring and evaluation and the drive to improve standards is followed with enthusiasm and commitment. Every full board meeting, in addition to receiving the minutes of the quality standards committee, receives a monitoring information report on quality and achievement. Reports from individual directors also contain information on successes, the student experience and areas of concern.

Draft plan in one day

There is an issue about governor training and education. In my opinion the opportunity to benefit from the professional expertise of one's own staff and to tailor sessions to one's own college circumstances is second to none. The most valuable and productive workshop I have ever attended was during our governors' residential weekend. The afternoon was led by one of our own governors and we brainstormed the strategic plan. We ended up with a raft of positive and workable proposals that we all could agree to. Senior managers took part in the exercise with us and at the end of the day we had written a draft plan to send out for consultation with all staff and students. That outcome could never have been achieved in a normal board meeting format.

These anecdotes are an effort to try and illustrate ways in which governors can enthuse, motivate and influence staff. It is extremely difficult to provide concrete evidence that governors have influenced anything. What does our monitoring of activities actually produce? We know why we do it. We are accountable – to the community, to government, the LSC, our students and our staff – but trying to achieve our goal without appearing like a police force is a major task. I believe we do that by convincing people of our commitment to our college and its community and by establishing an atmosphere of openness and trust and working beside staff. Our main aim is to help and support, not to make judgements.

Now available, *Governance today: rising to the challenge of raising achievement*. See page 14.

observing teaching and learning in adult and community education

Joni Cunningham, Quality and Staff Development Director at Redbridge Institute of Adult Education, on how four neighbouring adult services got together

Although Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge and Waltham Forest adult education services each had their own well-developed observation schemes, none was based on national quality criteria and none involved grading tutor performance. We decided to set up a joint quality project steering group. This resulted in us developing and piloting our first shared observation skills training programme and an observation scheme based on the Ofsted framework for inspecting Adult Education, which included grading against the 5-point scale.

The Common Inspection Framework

The pilot stood us in excellent stead when revising our scheme this year in the light of the Common Inspection Framework. We had already introduced quality standards in the areas of teaching, learning and achievement, which meant the observers in our pilot had been trained and were ready to put 'the learner at the heart of the process'. We were in a strong position and able to draw from this pool of trained, and by then accredited, observers to form an experienced, enthusiastic and committed cross-borough task group and so amend our observation records and introduce the scheme across all four services.

Grading

The old 5-point scale raised huge issues for us in terms of deciding what was 'normal' practice and what should be regarded as good or exceptional practice. A particularly persuasive argument was often made for awarding higher grades on the basis of what might be regarded as normal practice in an FE context but was certainly not yet normal practice in an adult education context. We welcomed the new 7-point scale.

Pairing

As part of their training, observers carried out paired observations in at least two other services. This brought the obvious benefits of working with an objective partner when judging performance and making grading decisions, as well as opportunities for benchmarking.

We share, challenge and moderate our observation records and use this experience to identify what we are good at in adult education. We have been able to celebrate learners who are:

- developing personal learning skills
- establishing good working relationships with peers and tutors
- active and applying real effort to succeed
- well supported by volunteers in basic skills classes
- benefiting from good planning, a range of diverse teaching methods and tutor resources
- learning, often in spite of some poor accommodation.

These judgements have been made with confidence; observers feel secure in the knowledge that they are based on sound evidence. The Common Inspection Framework has highlighted new service-wide weaknesses in health and safety, the use of IT, initial assessment, differentiated learning plans and assessing achievements. A 'beefed up' post-observation action plan with its requirement to identify 'SMARTER' quality improvements is helping observers work constructively with tutors to improve student learning.

One of the most exciting aspects of the project has been the accreditation of the learning experience of the observers participating in the project, through a work-based learning module validated by the Centre for Work-based Learning Studies at Middlesex University. Observers have had a very clear reminder of what it is like to be a student again. Those participants who have gone for accreditation have had to juggle work commitments to complete not only their paired observations but also a portfolio consisting of learning logs, observation records and a reflective essay. A useful reminder of how tough it can be to be a part-time adult learner on a challenging learning programme!

Download *Observing teaching and learning in ACL* from **www.qualityACL.org.uk**

publications

A college guide to benchmarking

Jane Owen
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Chris Horsfall
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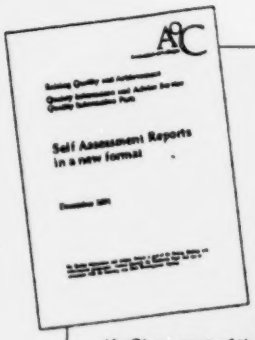
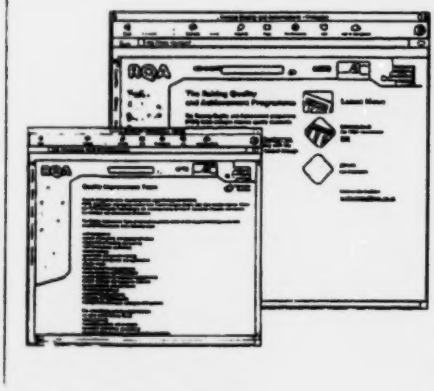


No query is too small for the quality information and advice service. Managed by the Association of Colleges (AoC) as part of the RQA Programme, staff are on hand to answer your questions about raising quality. Call Rosemary Clark or Maggie Scott on 020 7827 4611 or e-mail qualityadvice@aoc.co.uk

The service also produces over 30 information packs (see www.rqa.org.uk for a list of titles). The latest pack, and a very relevant one for this issue of *Quality matters*, looks at improving self-assessment procedures. Call Vicky Lai on the above number or e-mail qualitypacks@aoc.co.uk



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Log on to the RQA website for information on a range of issues, including updates on recent government, LSC and Ofsted/ALI initiatives. The development project site features interesting case studies that show how different colleges have tackled the issues of raising student retention and achievement levels. There is also a discussion forum where you can request information or advice on quality matters, or just air your opinions!

Work-based learning improvement planning

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Effective practice network meetings

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Fit for purpose – self-assessment for the small provider

1 March 2002 ▫ Sheffield

Equality and diversity in adult and community learning

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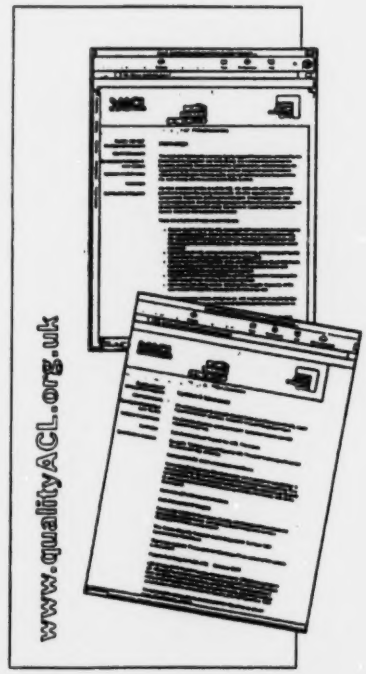

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